

Avoiding Abstract Language

Most individuals with autism have difficulty understanding abstract language, sarcasm, and metaphor. Individuals with autism may also take language literally.

Here are some examples of how we might use language in everyday situations:

"its raining cats and dogs".

"I've learnt so much today, it feels like my head is going to explode"

"You're so funny" said sarcastically.

Someone walks into a room and says *"goodness, its hot in here"*. A neuro-typical individual may think about opening a window, an autistic person may just assume that it is hot, and not have any notion to do something to change the situation.



These are examples of how language can be used in one way, but be meant or interpreted in another. For an autistic individual this type of language can be confusing, or the language and its meaning can be taken literally. The use of abstract concepts such as "I wish, I believe, I imagine" can also be very confusing for an autistic individual, because they are talking about concepts that are not visible or concrete, they are individual beliefs, or imaginary concepts.

Most of us learn to understand this type of language, and even if we haven't heard an expression before, we can often figure out its meaning from the context in which it was used. Teaching metaphors to autistic individuals can sometimes help with their understanding of these concepts, but there are thousands of examples of metaphors and often we make up our own. However, it is possible to teach some of the common ones so that an individual with autism can both understand their meaning and use them.

It is important to be aware of our own language when we communicate with individuals with autism. We must refrain from using sarcasm and abstract language. We must also be aware that things we say may be taken literally and so must think carefully before we make a comment or give a command. If we say something will happen later, we must be sure that it will happen. If we give a message, we must make sure it is clear and none ambiguous. The use of visuals and socials stories can be used to help individuals with autism understand language, tasks, and help them deal with changes in a routine.



For more information on communication approaches with individuals with an autistic spectrum disorder, and the use of visuals and social stories go to www.icommunicatetherapy.com

To learn more about Autism, language and communication click this link to see our [Suggested Reading](#) list and look at, and purchase books.

Suggested Reading:

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Veronica Zysk and Ellen Notbohm

Playing, Laughing and Learning With Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Resource of Play Ideas for Parents and Carers by Julia Moor

Overcoming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies, and Hope That Can Transform a Child's life by Lynn Kern Koegel and Claire LaZebnik

Self-Help Skills for People With Autism: A Systematic Teaching Approach by Stephen R. Anderson, Amy L. Jablonski, Vicki Madaus Knapp, and Marcus L Thomeer

Visual Supports for People With Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Marlene J. Cohen and Donna L. Sloan

A Picture's Worth: PECS and Other Visual Communication Strategies in Autism (Topics in Autism) by Andy, Ph.D. Bondy and Lori Frost

Solving Behavior Problems in Autism (Visual Strategies Series) by Linda A. Hodgdon

Making Visual Supports Work in the Home and Community: Strategies for Individuals with Autism and Asperger Syndrome by Jennifer L. Savner, Brenda Smith Hyles, and Brenda Smith Myles

Visual Language in Autism by Howard C. Shane and Sharon Weiss-Kapp

The New Social Story Book : Illustrated Edition by Carol Gray

My Social Stories Book by Abbie Leigh White, Carol Gray, and Sean McAndrew

The Social Skills Picture Book Teaching play, emotion, and communication to children with autism by Dr. Jed Baker

Comic Strip Conversations by Carol Gray